

Description

ROTARY BARRIER FACE SEALTechnical Field

The invention relates to sealing devices for rotatable shafts, where either sealed or barrier fluid is employed to generate hydrostatic and hydrodynamic forces or aerostatic and aerodynamic forces between stationary and rotary seal faces to establish separation for their non-contact operation.

5

Background of the Invention

Rotary fluid film face seals, also known as non-contact seals are applied to high speed and high pressure rotary shaft sealing operations, where otherwise face contact would cause excessive heat generation resulting in wear and tear of the seal faces. In a non-contact seal face operation, seal faces will separate when rotational velocity reaches lift-off speed and thus undesirable face contact is avoided.

10

A most successful method of generating non-contact separation between two sealing faces is by applying a shallow helical groove pattern on either one of the surfaces of the sealing faces, while the opposite sealing face remains flat and smooth. The area where the two sealing faces define a sealing clearance is labeled the sealing interface. The referred helical groove pattern applied to one of the sealing faces extends inward from the higher pressure circumference of the outer diameter to the inner end of the helical groove specified as the groove diameter.

15

20

The helical groove pattern forces fluid during shaft rotation from the higher pressure end of the sealing interface toward said groove diameter and thus drives the sealed fluid into remaining non-grooved portion of the sealing interface, thus keeping the sealing faces separated. While a certain amount of fluid will pass through the sealing

25

5 interface from the side of higher pressure to the side of
lower pressure, such fluid amount is considered the seal
leakage, an undesirable result of the need to maintain seal
face separation. The cooperation between the helical grooved
area and the non-grooved area on one of the sealing faces is
10 a most effective approach to maintain a stable gap designated
the sealing clearance.

The helical groove pumping action is an effective
mechanism to move fluids in between the sealing interface,
regardless of whether there are pressure differences or even
15 against pressure differentials. Moreover, even in reversed
pressure differential situations, the helical groove seal
still operates with adequate separation between the sealing
faces, but invariably accompanied by a certain amount of
leakage. Such seals are frequently used to divide two dif-
20 ferent fluids near atmospheric pressure from each other or in
contingencies where intermixing of fluids must be prevented
if one of them is flammable and the other one is air.

Statement of the Prior Art

25 With the presence of elevated rotational velocities and
pressures it becomes increasingly difficult to establish a
true barrier to prevent intermixing of fluids in non-contact
operation. Prior art solutions include the introduction of a
third, less chemically active fluid defined as an inert fluid
30 using Nitrogen, Carbon Dioxide or Helium to establish a bar-
rier in a process called buffering. Said buffering can take
two forms, either outside or within the sealing interface.
Buffering outside the sealing interface requires incomparably
larger amounts of costly inert gas due to large radial
35 clearances requiring high flow rates of fresh, uncontaminated
buffer fluid, whereas buffering inside the sealing interface,
where both sealing clearances and fluid volume subjected to
intermixing require much smaller amounts of buffer fluid.

5 U.S. Patent NO. 4,523,764 provides for such purpose a buffer
flow inlet as well as buffer flow outlet towards and away
from the sealing interface, which as opposed to the present
invention requires at least two fluid flow connections to the
sealing face to establish a sealing clearance, then to
10 recover part of the buffer fluid and more to provide for a
true barrier function.

U.S. Patent No. 4,212,475, U.S. Patent No. 3,704,019
and U.S. Patent No. 3,499,653 on the other hand, employ
spiral grooves to establish a stable sealing clearance, but
15 does not provide a solution to sealing applications, where
true fluid separation or barrier is mandated.

Statement of the Invention

20 According to the invention, buffer fluid is injected
directly into and adjacent the upstream end of the sealing
interface, with buffer fluid pressure slightly above that
coming from the process end of the barrier unit, whereby some
amount of buffer fluid is leaking towards the direction of
the process, such being diametrical to that of normal
25 interface flow and therefore terminating process fluid flow
towards the sealing interface. Said amount of leakage is
notably modest since it occurs through an extremely small
sealing clearance of less than about 35 microns, preferably
less than about 12 microns as compared to 120 microns, when
30 buffering takes place outside the sealing interface.
Resulting buffer fluid intermixing, consumption and cost
being orders of magnitude smaller, when buffered inside the
sealing interface, where above extremely small sealing
clearances are a true result of optimum utilization of
35 partial helical groove pattern.

Said minimal buffer fluid consumption makes it possible
to minimize flow passages, which in turn facilitates the
provision of more interface area for partial helical grooves,

5 thus enhances a narrower and more stable clearance. Minimal
buffer fluid consumption also makes it possible to avoid
having to recover buffer fluid and having to provide flow
passages for it which would once further reduce the sealing
interface area needed for the advantageous benefits of the
10 partial helical grooves.

These and many other features and attendant advantages
of the invention will become apparent as the invention
becomes better understood by reference to the following
detailed description when considered in conjunction with the
15 accompanying drawings.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Figure 1 is an axial quarter sectional view, showing an
identical tandem arrangement of a Rotary Barrier Face Seal;

20 Figure 2 is a view in elevation, partially in section
of the sealing face taken along line 2-2 of Figure 1;

Figure 3 is a view in elevation, partially in section
of the sealing face taken along line 3-3 of Figure 1;

25 Figure 4 is an enlarged sectional view taken along line
4-4 of Figure 3;

Figure 5 is an axial quarter sectional view of an
alternate embodiment of the Rotary Barrier Face Seal;

Figure 6 is a view in elevation, partially in section
of the sealing face taken along line 6-6 of Figure 5;

30 Figure 7 is a view in elevation, partially in section
of an alternate embodiment of the sealing face; and

Figure 8 is a view in elevation, partially in section
of a further embodiment of the sealing face.

Detailed Description of the Invention

35 Figure 1 displays the preferred embodiment of the
invention and its environment. This environment comprises a
housing 10 and a rotatable shaft 12, extending through said

5 housing. The invention is applied to seal and separate fluid within the annular space 14 from the fluid environment at 16.

Basic components of the rotary barrier seal face of the invention comprise an annular stationary ring 20, having a radial extending face 22 in sealing relation with a radial extending face 26 of an annular rotary ring 24. The stationary ring 20 is held in place by an annular retainer 40, and its outer diameter engages a lip of the low friction static seal 60. Cover 18 locks the retainer 40 and the static seal 60 against the shoulder 48 of the housing 10 to prevent axial movement.

An O-ring seal 56 extends around the outer circumference of the retainer 40 to preclude leakage of buffer fluid at ports 58 and 64 into fluid environment 16 between retainer 40 and housing 10. Amid retainer 40 and stationary ring 20 is a plurality of springs 46, spaced equidistantly around the circumference of retainer 40. Springs 46 act against an annular disc 44, urging the stationary ring 20 into engagement with the rotary ring 24. An O-ring 42 seals the space between the stationary ring 20 and retainer 40. The rotary ring 24 is retained in the axial position by the drive sleeve 36 and the clamp sleeve 34. Drive sleeve 36 and clamp sleeve 34 are concentric with the shaft 12 and both are locked on to the shaft 12 between shaft shoulder 62 and locknut 38 threaded onto shaft 12. The O-ring seals 50 and 52 preclude leakage between the rotary ring 24, the drive sleeve 36 and the shaft 12.

In operation, radial extending face 22 of the stationary ring 20 and radial extending face 26 of rotary ring 24 are in sealing relationship, maintaining a very narrow sealing clearance, generated by a helical groove pattern 28 on the sealing face 26 of the rotary ring 24. Opposite arrangements with said helical groove pattern on the sealing face 22 of the stationary ring 20 are also effective

5 and will be shown below.

Said narrow clearance prevents generation of friction heat and wear, yet limiting consumption and outflow of the buffer fluid supplied through opening 30 into crescent-shaped pockets 32 which have a pressure-equalizing function, whereas
10 the same function can also be achieved by means of an annular recess, which will be shown below.

Figure 2 shows a view in elevation of the sealing face 26 of the rotary ring 24 with a pattern of helical grooves 28 according to Figure 1, taken along line 2-2. Shown helical
15 grooves 28 are directed counter-clockwise and inward for a particular direction of shaft rotation and will be directed clockwise and inward for the opposite direction of shaft rotation. Non-grooved area 54 at the outside diameter of the sealing face 26 fosters restriction of outflow of buffer gas
20 into process fluid at annular space 14 of Figure 1 as will be shown below.

Figure 3 is a view in elevation of the seal face 22 of the stationary ring 20 according to Figure 1 taken along line 3-3. Exposed are openings 30 for the supply of the buffer
25 fluid. Pressure of said buffer fluid is circumferential equalized by concentric crescent-shaped pockets 32, whilst outward outflow of said buffer fluid is restricted between narrow dam 66 and the non-grooved area 54 of the sealing face 26 as shown in Figure 2. Although Figure 3 shows said cres-
30 cent-shaped pockets within stationary ring 20, the same pressure equalizing arrangements will also be effective with said pockets within said rotary ring.

Figure 4 shows an enlarged view in section taken along line 4-4 of Figure 3, through both stationary ring 20 and
35 rotary ring 24. Arrows within clearance between rotary ring 24 and stationary ring 20 show the direction of buffer fluid outflow from pockets 32 and opening 30, exposing the key mechanism for maintaining separation of process fluids

09750024-12200

5 between space 14 and at environment 16 according to Figure 1 and according to Figure 5 shown below.

Figure 5 shows another embodiment of the invention, where low friction static seal 68 engages with the bore of the retainer 40 and rests within disc 44. An additional O-
10 ring 76 between disc 44 and stationary ring 20 prevents intermixing of buffer fluid and process fluid at space 14. Static O-ring seals 70 and 72 as well as 74 help channel said buffer fluid via ports 58 and 64 toward openings 30 and a circumferential groove 33.

15 Figure 6 shows a view in elevation of the sealing face according to Figure 5 taken along line 6-6, where the partial helical groove pattern is formed in the sealing face 22 of the stationary ring 20. Circumferential groove 33 is located near the stationary ring 20 outer diameter, from which it is
20 separated by a narrow dam 66. Said circumferential groove 33 serves to equalize buffer fluid pressure circumferentially, while it can be formed in either one of the two sealing faces to obtain the above purpose. Inner circumference of the groove 33 defines outer extent of the pattern of helical
25 grooves 28.

Figure 7 shows another embodiment of the elevation view of the rotary ring 24 according to Figure 1 taken along line 2-2. This arrangement does not embrace a non-grooved dam area at the outer diameter of the face 26 and may be applied
30 in situations where helical groove pattern is exceedingly shallow.

Figure 8 shows another embodiment of the elevation view of the stationary ring 20 according to Figure 1 taken along line 3-3. A plurality of openings 30 supply buffer fluid
35 into the sealing face 22 of said stationary ring 20.

It is to be realized that only preferred embodiments of the invention have been described and that numerous substitutions, modifications and alterations are permissible

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO